SELF PUBLISHER!

★ MAGAZINE ★

FORTH

IN THIS ISSUE

GENE DECICCO
GLENN TIPPET
MICHAEL JANTZE
BRYAN RANDALL
SUSAN STUCKEY

PAGES

SNEAK PEEKS!

A WRITTEN VIEW

O.M.G. IT'S MARIO GULLY'S

DIRTY BONES

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SELF PUBLISHER MAGAZINE

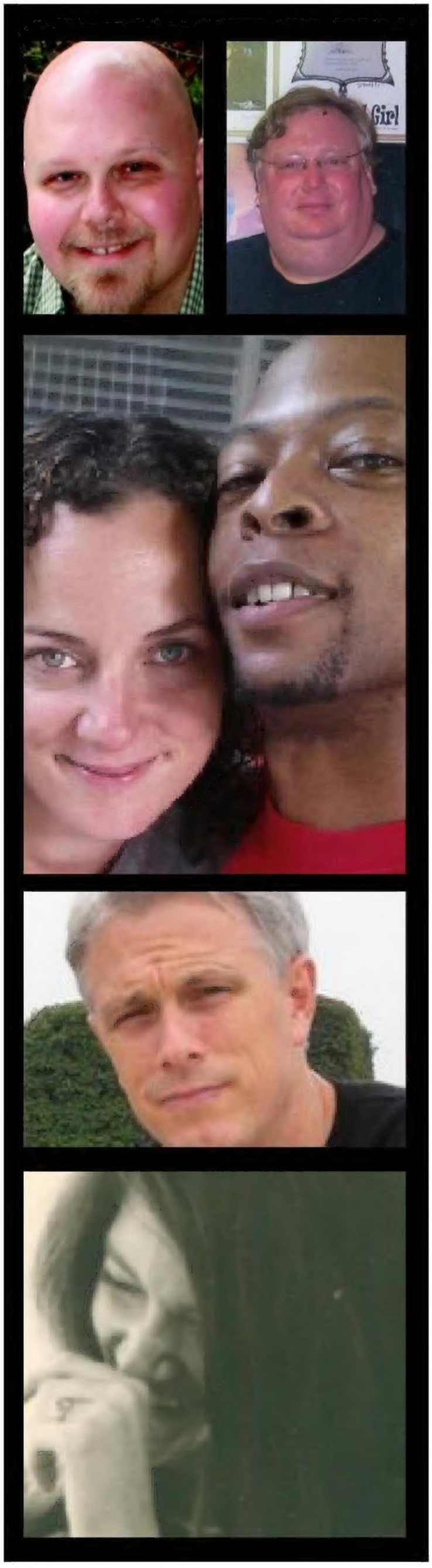
Roadmap for SP!

It's time for us to start looking at the roadmap for the future of Self Publisher! Magazine. Things have been going nicely and we continue to line up really nice, solid articles for upcoming issues, so that bodes well for the magazine getting more and more popular. We have added Douglas Owen to staff as our Circulation Manager and I'm in the process of turning over those parts of the magazine that I've traditionally done to him, as he also digs in and plans out his own vision of how to get more eyes looking at our pages. We're going to have ISSN set up for SP! for the first time in its 20-plus-years history. I'm kinda excited about that. And that's why we need to start looking at the future of the magazine.

See, I've been down the road a number of times, in many different incarnations of Self Publisher! Magazine... including the times when we called it Obscurity Unlimited, The Guide to Self Published Periodicals, and later, just The Guide. The problem we always run into is scalability. The magazine gets too big content-wise to keep everything coming in, presented well, and in the timely way that gets us to be "big" in the first place. We ran into a little of this the past month, with people on the waitlist—that we use to keep the "first-come first-served" nature of an even playing field.—getting to the top of the list, only to no longer be reachable through the contact info they gave, or be otherwise unresponsive. We had a rash of them, so to speak—which was a bit frustrating both to me and to the interviewers being assigned "dead" leads. The only solution we really have is to seek out more interviewers, who can help us keep the larger number of people looking for coverage of projects moving through the waitlist faster. Which we will be doing.

And there begins the growth that has ultimately made issues too big for their own good in the past. And so, how will I make things different this time, so we don't collapse under our own weight... especially in the face of the idea of starting up Small Press Idol again, soon? Well, first step is going to be starting a new section of the website, where articles from SP! will be posted as each new issue is released. This will allow us to do a few things as we develop. First, we can design articles that begin in the magazine and then continue on a webpage, so a three-to-four-page presentation can be made shorter and still do its job. Then perhaps, when we're really rolling and covering a lot of creators regularly, we'll have a "web-only" page of headlines in the magazine, that promotes who didn't make it into the actual issue. I also see that we'll likely have a "new listings" section for new books and other things that actively bring magazine and website closer together. It's the only solution I see to keeping a magazine at the size that people will download and read or be able to get physical copies of it... and still cover as much as we can. I'm putting this out there to see what people think about it, and I am interested to hear what people think of where we're going with things.

- Ian Shires



contents

4 Big Dog, Humble Man (Mario Gully cover story)

An interview with Mario Gully by Jay Savage

14 The Pop Report

By Ian Shires

16 A Written View

By Douglas Owen

17 Fishbowl Chronicles

By Mark Turner

19 An interview with Gene DeCicco

By Mark Turner

24 An interview with Glenn Tippet

By Ellen Fleischer

27 Sneak Peek!

A Sneak Peek! from Cloud 9 Comix! ADVENT COMICS PRESENTS COSMOS

32 An interview with Michael Jantze

By Louise Cochran-Mason

35 An interview with Bryan Randall

By Jeniffer "Scraps" Vanderbeek

37 An interview with Susan Stuckey

By Douglas Owen

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BIG DOG

MARIO GULLY

An Interview with the ANT and DIRTY BONES creator

By: Jay Savage

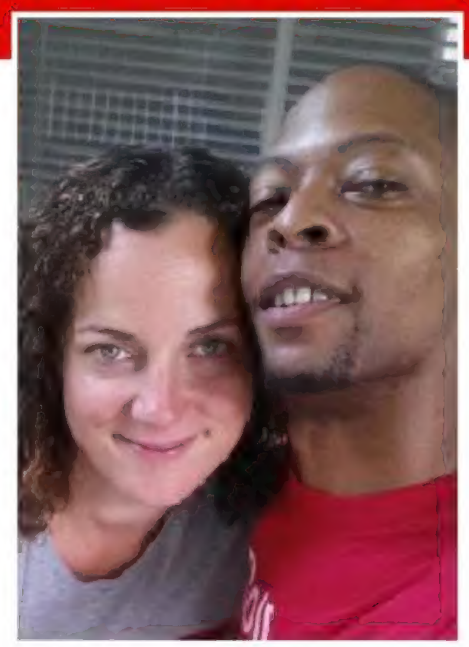
The comic book industry is full of inspiring success stories. Stories of the unknown or Indie creator making it big, stories of the creator that just won't give up. Recently, I had the honor of interviewing one such creator and friend, Mario Gully. Mario is a man who 'like most of us' has taken his fair share of knocks in life and comics, yet refuses to give up and 'as a result' is turning out his best work in years! Mario Gully is an artist, writer, and editor. He is the creator of the comic book Ant, which has been published by Arcana, Image, and Big City. He has drawn for Marvel Comics and Dynamite Entertainment. This month, he sat down with SP! to talk about his work, his influences, his goals, and his plans for the future.

SP!: When did you first decide that you wanted to create your own comics as a career?

MG: I started comic book-style artwork when I was, like, nine or ten years old. I didn't think about it as being a career, I was just having fun. When I was 18 years old... that's when I decided that I was going to pursue comic books as a career. I had a coworker who was an aspiring writer at Checkers fast food. He was going to submit something to DC comics. I showed him some of my art and he told me that I should seriously think about getting into comic books. I was inspired to try to become a comic book professional at that point. I really did not like doing odd jobs and stuff like that, but I liked drawing, so that's just how it went.

SP!: Who has had the biggest influence on you outside the comics industry and how did they affect your life?

MG: That's a tough question. I have many influences in my life, in and out of comics. We could start with people I admire, like Eddie Murphy, Will Smith, Rhonda Byrne, Wallace Wattles, Bruce Lee and Einstein, as well as my family and friends. I believe you should have as many influences in your life as possible. I really stand on many giants' shoulders for influence.

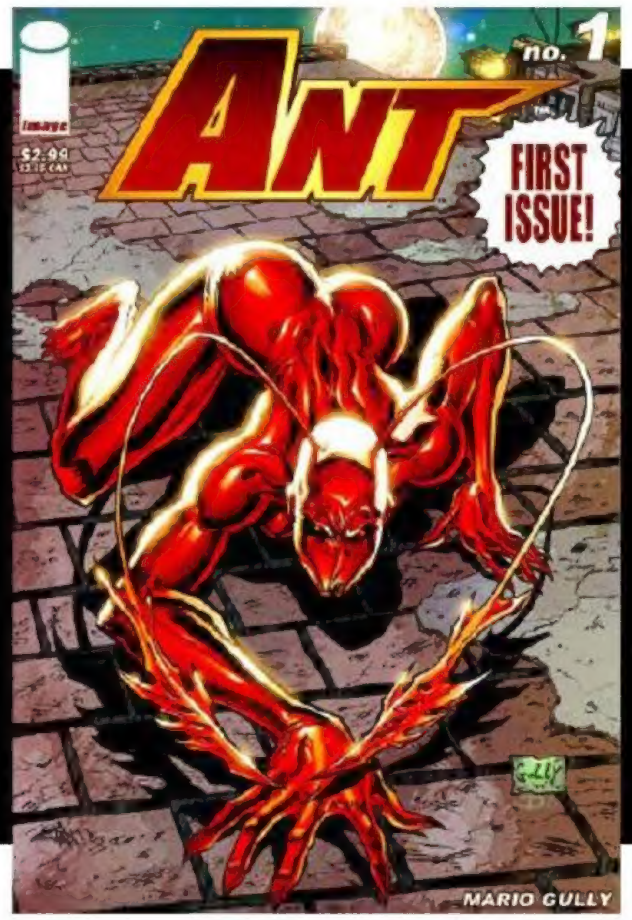


SP! Who has had the biggest influence on your comics career and how has that person changed your work?

MG: Todd McFarlane is my biggest influence, but not just because of his artwork. I am more focused on becoming a creator with ideas and concepts that I want the world to see. Todd went against the norm and helped start the legitimacy of independent comic books, period. He also made a good choice in believing in himself and not looking at the world around him at the time. He is my biggest influence in the comic book industry, by far. I am influenced by that style of art, but I have come into my own, I think.

SP!: What do you do to recharge your creative batteries?

MG: When I'm tired, I try to keep myself entertained. I have four beautiful children and there's never a lack of entertainment around here! I like to read a lot and I meditate daily. I am starting to find out now that if you keep a pretty good regime, it makes life so much easier and I'm learning that if I get adequate rest at night, creativity



is usually in the morning, served up with tea. (Lol!)

SP!: Describe your typical work routine.

MG: I get up in the morning and I spend about an hour reading something educational or inspirational. Bryan Taylor, a financial guru, calls that the "golden hour" and it's part of his 1000 percent increase plan; I highly recommend it. After that, I make my "to do list" and typically, I will draw until 5 and 6 pm. When that is done, I'm Daddy and I don't think about or focus on work-related stuff anymore. Being self employed, I had to learn a lot about scheduling and putting things in their proper place.

SP!: What tools do you use to create comics and what makes them the right tools for you?

MG: I use 2h lead in my pencil, because it is a lighter lead and it takes ink well. Most professionals use 2h lead. I draw on standard comic book artist paper, called Bristol board. I draw on Bristol because it soaks up ink well and it's a better quality of paper, so you don't have to worry about smudges or bleeds. I use a 102 nib and India ink for my inking and I have a couple of sizes of brushes that I like. I prefer to use a #1 is for hair and texture, and as for writing concerns, I use my android and sometimes, my voice recorder.

SP!: What element of your work gives you the most personal satisfaction?

MG: First of all, I'm grateful to have the ability to draw at all! I didn't ask for it. I believe everyone has a talent, whether they like to admit it or not. Some may ignore the urge and it eventually disappears. It's the development of talents that I have found makes one successful. My interpretation of that is like: you have skill on one hand and raw talent on the other. One should have a successful combination of the two. Take your God-given ability and study your craft until you know about the different facets of the art, etc., then make something beautiful from it. My biggest satisfaction from my artwork is when somebody sees it and they say, "omg," that's what I like. No matter who they are or where they are, to have somebody appreciate what I draw is a very nice feeling!

SP!: What has been the most rewarding project in your professional career—in or out of comics—and why?

MG: The next project is always the next exciting thing. Because if you have new things coming to you, then you are wanted by someone, and that is the reward!

SP!: We've all met very talented newcomers who are trying to get their first professional projects. What's the best advice you've ever heard given to a promising new creator?

MG: I bumped into Angel Medina at San Diego Comic Con and he told me that Todd McFarlane told him that there is no better school than the school of hard knocks. I didn't understand it back then, but I do now and I agree completely.

SP!: Time to get philosophical: What's the most important "big idea" that you've learned in life—in or out of comics—and why is it important?

MG: The biggest idea that I've discovered in my life, so far, is that your thoughts become reality. This is a deep metaphysical truth that I have found that has opened up a world of beauty and gratitude. Everything in existence started from a thought. With persistence and faith, it becomes a reality. I can talk about this all day long, but that's the gist of it. I recommend for anyone who may be reading this interview, a book called The Magic by Rhonda Byrne.

It is a fantastic read and I highly recommend both that, and the Art of Getting Rich by Wallace Wattles. They go deeper into this concept. If a person has these two books in their library, all kind of doors will open

SP!: You had great success with Ant. Can you tell us about that character and what that period in your career means to you?

MG: Ant was a comic book I wrote and created that was first published by Arcana Studios in 2003. At Arcana Studios, the original story was about a little girl who wanted to be a superhero when she grew up, so she wrote about her fantastic adventures in her journal. When I went to Image Comics about publication, Erik Larsen the publisher at the time, had ideas as well and we wanted to incorporate Ant into the Image Comics universe. So we changed the story a bit and it became about a reluctant hero trying to discover her past and who she is. We did 11 issues, nice issues, with Image Comics and after that, I sold Ant to Erik Larsen! We are working to bring more Ant to life in the future. The successes I have had with Ant (i.e. selling out in nine days at Arcana Studios, selling over 15,000 copies of Ant #1 with Image) I am grateful for, truly! The Ant project, in my mind, is a nice success that has gained an audience and people seem to dig it!

What that period means to me?, It proves to me that I can dream something and make it come to life with hard work. When I first shopped Ant around, it got turned down by everyone, including Image at least three times. It was my first professional break and that period gives me a lot of confidence in meeting my goals today.

SP!: Most creators would give anything to work at Image in any capacity. How did your stint with Image come about and what was your experience like?

MG: I bugged Erik Larsen and that's how I got my foot in at Image. The experience was wonderful and still is. Ant is concreted at Image and to have my character in the same playground with Savage Dragon, Spawn, Cyberforce, Walking Dead, etc.., I'm pretty grateful for that. It brings much legitimacy to my creation.

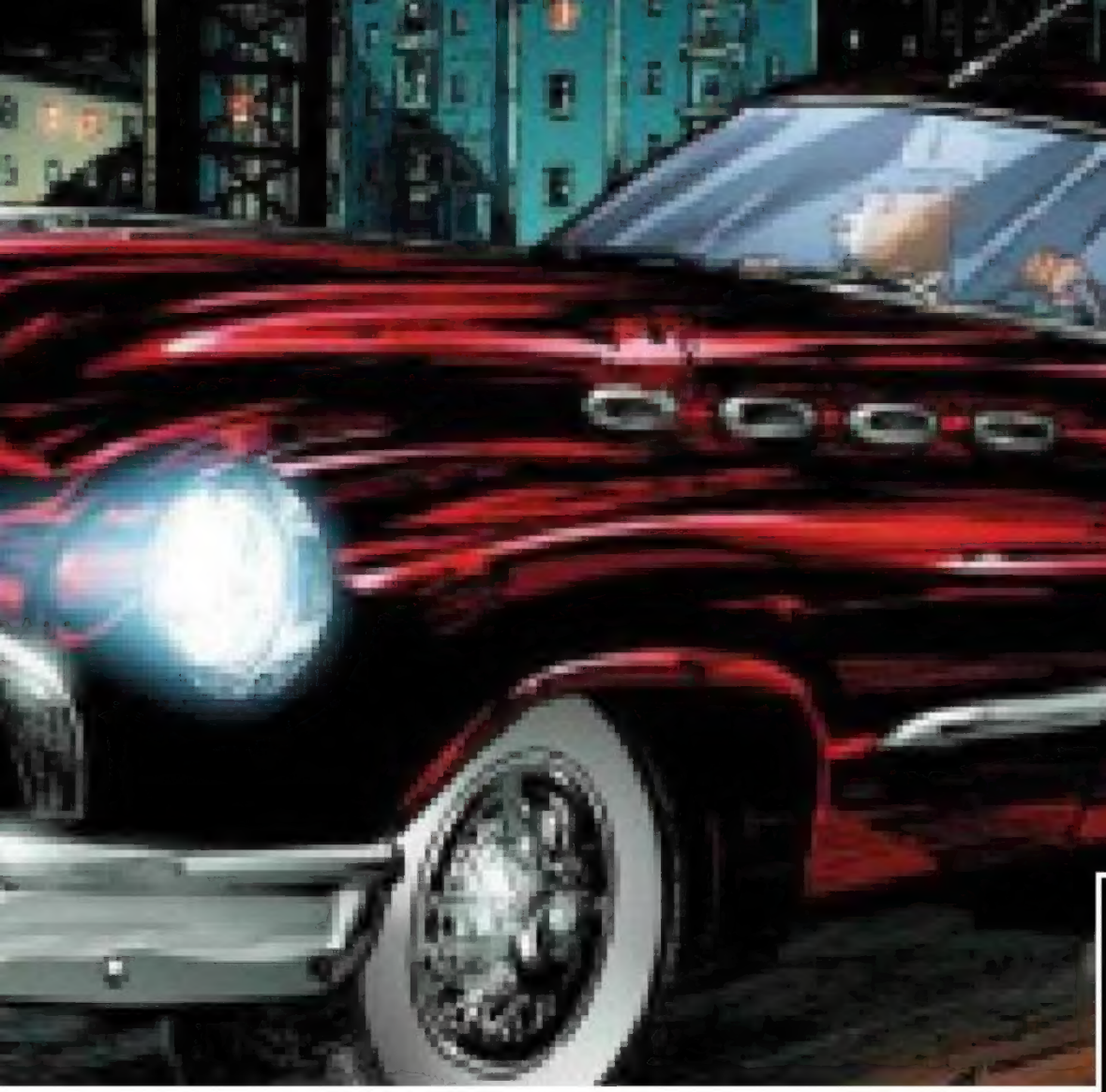
SP!: What, may I ask, was the reason your relationship with Image came to an end?

MG: it's not the end. Erik Larsen and I are working on an Ant project right now, but circumstances played out and I did some stuff at Marvel and between different projects from different clients, being a single dad, trying to raise four kids... Sometimes circumstances dictate what we do. I'm excited for the things me and Erik Larson are talking about.

SP!: After you moved on from Image Comics, what did you focus on, both creatively and in life in general? Was this a time of reflection for you?

MG: After, and even during, the time I was doing Ant books at Image, I was talking to Marvel about the illustrated line. Treasure Island, Man in the Iron Mask, etc. That conversation led to two graphic novels and other stuff. Then I had some personal issues, separating from my wife, etc. Different ideas came about from different things and I took some time off. I went through a ton, so a lot of things changed but the whole ball of wax was a great learning experience. I think my art work and creativity is more mature now than it was, and maybe that hard knock life played an important role?

SP!: How do you feel you have grown as a creator and as a person since your first pro gig in comics?



MG: Well, I can draw a lot better (haha!), and I know a lot more about the business side. It's just a growth process and it naturally comes with the job, I guess. It's kind of like tasting a very good soup that you love and order, but now you have the recipe for it and you hang out with the people who cut the carrots for it. Good times!

SP!: Do you have any plan of publishing work through Image, or are you currently working on any projects for Image Comics?

MG: Well, there's definitely this project with Erik Larson. I'm pretty sure that's going through Image and I'm very excited about that. I have some things I would like to talk to them about, if the time comes. That's all I can say for sure, right now.

SP!: Dirty Bones: I keep hearing about and reading about this project on the web. What is Dirty Bones, in your own words, and what is all the hype about?

MG: Dirty Bones is an epic adventure in a world of dog and cats. Rover, the main character, is a pit bull-terrier mix who gave up his life on the streets and is on a quest for self-discovery. He stands against segregation between mutts and pedigrees and is determined to break that boundary.

Dirty is the antagonist. He owns New Bark City and he has a diabolical plan to put fleas in bones in order to gain even more domination over the city, hence dirty bones. I was toying with this idea six years ago, and I'm so happy that all the reviews appear to be positive. Honestly, I think the hype is due to the fact that the artwork seems to be turning heads and the story is something new and something fresh. It's inspired by Harlem Nights with a mix of Avatar, something never before seen, really.

SP!: Dirty Bones was a pretty big deal over the last couple months, in the media and on Kickstarter.com. Please enlighten us on your venture with this project and update us on future plans for this title as well.

MG: I felt that people used to put me in a category. You automatically

get labeled as a T&A artist with a female protagonist like Ant. I wanted to show everyone that I have more tools in my toolbox and I might be more creative than some people like to credit. I wanted to create something a bit different in American mainstream comics. As for future plans of Dirty Bones, I have acquired a partner on this particular property and all decisions about the future and where the book is headed are discussed at Starbucks at 6 am (haha).

SP!: Don't get me wrong, Dirty Bones is, no doubt, an amazing premise and very unique, but can we expect to see the Ant again? If so can you let us know when and where?

MG: Yes, Ant is coming back! Erik Larson has written the book and drawn all the thumbnails for it. As Erik said, we are going to do something unprecedented in the history of comic books. I'm very excited about it. Stay tuned!

SP!: What advice would you give a creator either self-publishing their own work or trying to break into the business working for a certain company?

MG: I am going to steal a page from Eddie Murphy's book. The best advice I can give is no advice at all. Other than that, do the basics, have a good goal in mind, and try to reach that goal. That's the best I can tell you.

SP!: There is no doubt that you have had some ups and downs in the industry and have done some amazing work. But what would you like to tell us about Mario Gully? What makes you tick? What's your driving force?

MG: Bottom line, I'm a single dad with four kids trying to do the very best that I can and show them that they can do what they want to do in this world. I have been through a lot in my life and the pursuit of happiness has been a very interesting road for me. I find what is important to me now is having children who love you as much as you love them; I have a wonderful woman in my life and I have some amazing friends and people who admire what I do. It doesn't get too much better than that.

What makes me tick? Honestly, I am practicing very hard not to have any negativity in my life. That means I do my best to have my thoughts, attitude, behavior, and external sources be as positive and uplifting as they can be. So, what makes me tick is that I haven't got rid of the tick yet (Lol).

SP!: In closing, what would you like to leave our readers with?

MG: I would like to thank anybody who may have found this interview interesting and I'm grateful to the onlookers, whoever they may be. To the person who is trying to find their way, whether it be in the comic book industry or anything else, persistence goes a long way.

Mario, Thanks again for taking the time out of your busy schedule to talk with us. I know I speak for everyone at SP! Magazine when I say it is greatly appreciated! We look forward to speaking with you again in the future.

SNEAK PEEK!

MARIO GULLY'S DIRTY BONES

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MARIO GULLY'S DIRTY BONES

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MARIO GULLY'S DIRTY BONES

The POP REPORT

By Ian Shires

Hello folks! Last year, I did a series of articles looking over the state of distribution for the indie scene. I concluded that the market was in a state of confusion and that there was no one perfect, solid solution for anyone. Some places do some things better, others do other things better. Most systems seem set up to make more $$ off a publication than the creator does, and, no one really knows how many copies of anything is actually being bought by fans... Most sales at any online place are generally what the publishers themselves send to the site.

So, what good is that? I mean, if you are driving your own sales to a place that makes more than you do off the sale, what does that mean? The only real advantage to doing so is the order fulfillment/stock investment savings—not having boxes of stuff in a spare room just sitting there until it sells. But the thought and atmosphere of thinking that there is ANYWHERE you can go to get sales without serious effort, is an illusion. There is no effort being made anywhere, to build audience first and then show those people good new stuff. Discovery of new and good series is solidly, and hugely, social media-driven, and more and more people rely on a friends-list to sell to. The problem being there is the huge fragmentation of community and audience. It's like dust and gas clouds, to which you introduce gravity, and then there are stars and galaxies and they all float about separately.

This magazine has been witness to many ages of "the network". The one it was born in had no internet. We got so big, we literally ended up buried in the publications being sent to us. There was the version that I ran on the fledgling internet. Started as an eight-page digest, ended as a 60-page magazine with the same problem: more people looking for coverage than we could handle...and we were running Small Press Idol by then! It needed a new model.

I like this version of SP!, because it is scalable. Even if we get a huge waitlist of people looking for coverage, I can seek out additional interviewers and simply do more. My thought is that, at some point, we will do things like start articles in the magazine and finish them on web pages... and other things to keep the actual magazine a reasonable size, while the information we are putting forth continues to grow.

SP! has always been very interested in what people think is popular. We have run monthly voting systems many times for a "Pop Chart"—but it is very very hard to keep such information honest and unskewed when voters figure out voting systems, etc. So, until I can figure out a way to do it right, I'm going to do some examining of what the websites out there are putting forth as their popular titles, etc. Most sites have some sort of bestseller list. Getting exact sales numbers from the sites isn't going to happen. They don't want us to know. The only way would be to ask those publishers at the top of their lists what their sales were, individually. This is because site A does not want the public to be able to compare how many copies their #1 title sold to site B's. Unless you KNOW you have your competition beat, there's a risk of saying "Yeah, that's 650 copies," only to have site B say "Oh? Our #1 title sold 2,300"... not that I believe there is ANY indie out there selling even 650 copies online. I simply have not heard ANYONE brag about their sales... which means there is likely nothing to brag about out there, yet.

Our goal for Self Publisher! Magazine, and for the Self Publisher Association behind it, is to see publishers making living wages off of their work. Yes, we also support the idea of people doing comics as a hobby and that's an area of publishing that can be just as rewarding and fun as anything, but when great properties that could and should be able to earn a creator a career... don't, it's a tragedy and something that, with better education and tools available, could be turned around.

Well, I have gotten a bit long-winded about things, here in this first edition of this column. This time out, I will be including the lists of top stuff without the commentary that I want to start providing about it in future. We have a lot to dig into, so I hope you will all bear with me as we get this feature on the long road from peeking at what's going on, to being able to affect those lists, by providing information to readers they can't get elsewhere easily without doing the research themselves. So begins the Pop Report.

Graphicly.com

Has a section of "Top Issues"—which does not specifically say "This is #1," etc. Looking at the page, there is a mix of mainstream and indie properties. I find this to be a good presentation for readers, as it's fair and random, allowing for discovery. It seems to provide an equal shot at being there, so it's good for publishers as well.

www.comixology.com

The Top Selling section is completely dominated by mainstream. 11 pages deep and you still see Avengers. There is a new books section and a staff picks section, where there is an occasional indie, but they too are dominated by mainstream books. If you know what you are looking for, you can search for it, but casual readers looking for something new will not find indy books here.

www.indyplanet.com

As the name suggests, this place is ALL Indie and browsing here is encouraged by genre, or you can sort by price or popularity. Sorting by popularity, I didn't recognize very many books at all. Plus, you can buy digital or POD here. From a reader standpoint, this is great.

comics.drivethrustuff.com

Comparable to Indyplanet in search-ability. They do present the What's New and What's Popular very prominently, which is a good step presentation-wise. Their Top 100 does show what's best selling on down, which is something I like and find more interesting in seeing what other people like. Especially interesting is that some of the bigger indy companies are not the biggest sellers here. I'll have more to say about that next month. They do offer print on some books, but most are digital only. May be a drawback to some shoppers.

www.cloud9comix.com

Cloud 9 focuses solidly on device readers, with an app for exclusive comic content. This is a different model and animal from the more -inclusive sites we're talking about here, but the content is definitely more focused and of highest quality. Readers are presented with solid indie content, that can't be found elsewhere. In this model, it's definitely something worth a look.

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A WRITTEN VIEW

Creating Memorable Characters

By Douglas Owen

We all do it. We create strong protagonists with motives that are un-muddied and singular in purpose. But are they real? What about the minor characters? Are they real? Does anyone remember them after the scene was complete? Why not?

To be honest, there are easy ways to do this, and there are ways to take it too far.

Little Things Matter

There should be something about every character you introduce that sets them apart from the others. It could be a facial tic, a slight limp, a habit, or even the way they dress. People don't realize it right away, but it is these little things that make your writing jump off the page.

But don't go overboard. One facial tic is fine for a minor character, but add in another distinct tic and the minor character is taking on too much. People will wonder why you've told them that his left eye twitches, his nostrils flare when he inhales and the corner of his mouth pulls back randomly. This minor character now has more idiosyncrasies than a major one.

Adding that special 'tag' to a minor character will make the reader enjoy the work that much more. Even if we never use that character again, the reader will remember. It's the difference between a good read and a great read. Once they are done, the reader will comment that even the minor characters felt real. This will translate to more sales and better referrals.

Tall, short, fat, thin. These are the descriptors other writers put on minor characters. How different are they from others you've seen? Not much and the writer has no imagination. Try to think of what makes that one character tick. Even if you only see them for a few paragraphs, make that minor character real. Make it something more than just a wine coloured birth mark. Be imaginative and engage your readers.

Even if you make the minor character skinny, you still want to have something different. You can remind the reader of the character's thinness later in the narrative. "He squeezed through the door before it was even a tenth of the way open."

Physical or Psychological

Quirks can be manifested in two different ways: physical or psychological.

Physical quirks are easy. It could be that facial tic or slight limp. One side of their face could be paralyzed from a stroke or any other of a hundred different issues. Just don't put too much into the character, unless there is a reason for it, and if there is, then they are not a minor character.

Psychological issues are a little more difficult, but so much more rewarding. Take the character of Dexter by Jeff Lindsay. The depths of his psychological issues are amazing. And while he is a main character, even minor characters have interesting depths to them.

A Dress Habit

If you see a beautiful woman dressed only in a bikini you may judge them as a bimbo, brainless, or stupid. Put that same person in a lab coat with their hair tied back, and you have a doctor.

The way a person dresses has a major impact on how we see them. Use this tool to make someone different than the rest. Have them dress conservatively except for a large gold cross on a long chain.

Your choices will have a huge impact on the minor characters.

Tics in Space… I Mean Speech

Dickens loved putting small, curious speech patterns on his characters. Remember the Cockneyisms of Sam Weller and his pronunciations of Ws as Vs? If not, you should re-visit the work.

There are a number of ways to make a character be exactly what you want. Have them say "Yeah, right" after their asked to do something, or when they are told information. People will start to really hate them.

The Odd Character

Think of a strange behaviour someone you know has. It could be something you like or really cringe about. Maybe they wipe their nose a lot, or they always cross their arms. Something small will add depth. And depending on what it is they do, it will impact how they are perceived by the reader.

There could be a cultural trait, like the Japanese slight head-bowing and echoing the word for yes. Just about any cultural habit can be pushed to a limit, or beyond.

Remember to add little quirks to your secondary characters, but don't go overboard when portraying major characters or your story will be quickly dismissed. The theme should always be to add depth for the reader, not create an abyss to lose them in.

THE FISH BOWL CHRONICLES

By Mark Turner

Welcome to another edition of The Fish Bowl Chronicles! One of the most important aspects of learning about the process of comic book creation is talking to those who've done it not once, but multiple times successfully.

Connecting with creators whose work you admire and who present a level of quality you would like to see reflected in your own is a must. With these connections, those who aspire to enter the ranks of creators find mentors and peers who can offer insight and guidance on how best to run the marathon race that is the comic book industry. I've been fortunate enough to make such a connection with Jiba Molei Anderson of Griot Entertainment (www.griotentertainment.com). Mr. Anderson is the writer, creator, and artist responsible for such properties as The Horsemen, Outworld, and Consonance.

Gracious enough to take time out of a busy schedule, Mr. Anderson helped to provide some direction and answered questions that I was finding myself asking about the journey that I am on. So, pull up a chair and grab a notepad and pencil, because class is in session and the professor is breaking it down.

SP!: What should writers consider once they have a script and storyline they'd like to pursue?

JMA: As a creator, once you've settled on the concept of your story, you've got to think about how you want that story to be portrayed. One art style does not fit all. For example, if your story has a Gothic atmosphere and the artist you're working with (even if the writer is the artist) loves drawing in an anime style à la Pokémon, it's not going to work.

Keep in mind that comics are a collaborative medium. Not just in the sense of multiple people working together to create a cohesive whole, but also disparate elements (i.e. art, script, lettering, coloring, and design) coming together to generate a memorable and lasting reading experience.

SP!: How many scripts should a creator have in the can before even considering starting production?

JMA: It depends. If it's a one-shot, that one script. If it's a mini-series, a writer should, at the extremely least, have the entire story plotted out. You want to have some flexibility to allow the story to evolve, as most stories tend to do in the creative process. However, you do need a road map. You have to understand, ultimately, where the story is going.

My rule of thumb is this: You need to know how your story starts and how your story ends. The middle is the journey that your story takes in order to get to its final destination.

SP!: How can a writer make a project more attractive when funding is a major issue?

JMA: Here's the thing: if you're writing comics to get rich, get out of the business. Right now. You're not serious about the work; you're not serious about being a creator. If you are looking for a collaborator and the first thing that they talk about is how much you're going to pay them? Don't work with them. They don't care about your project. You haven't gotten them excited about it. More importantly, you haven't made them care enough about the story so much that they want to help bring the concept to life.

You are not the "Corporate Two." You are not a major publishing company where you have the funds to hire people to work on your projects whether they love the material or not. You are an individual looking for a partner in crime. You are Riggs looking for his Murtaugh, Thelma looking for her Louise, Bonnie looking for her Clyde… You feel me?

SP!: As a creator, how do you remain focused on one task at a time, when being an indie creator entails so many aspects (marketing, writing, editing, etc)?

JMA: It's very simple: do you consider this a hobby or do you consider this your career? If it's just a hobby to you, you're not going to be focused on any aspect of getting your product out. Everything

will become this wistful notion of "one day, someday". You'll just waste time waiting, hoping, and dreaming.

Now, if you consider this your career, that mindset will focus your efforts.

You will spend the hours necessary to get the work done.

You will stay up until 4 am finishing those pages, because you are a week behind.

You will take that week in between production after the book is finished to update your blog, tweet potential fans and interact (not waste time) on Facebook.

You will finish that article someone asked you to write for Self Publisher! Magazine and apologize profusely for turning in the article a day late. *laugh*

SP!: Is it possible for a creator on little to no budget to create a product that gets noticed (for all the right reasons)?

JMA: Yes it is possible. First of all, you must believe that your product is valid and will be valued. If you believe that, then you will take the steps to get that work out there and have your voice heard.

You cannot be passive in this game. You cannot be reactive. You have to be proactive. You have to think of yourself as a business and as a brand. You have to step out of your comic book world and interact with the real world.

See how others market and promote their material. Develop your voice. Be humble. Be interactive. Be interesting. People want to buy your personality as well as your product.

SP!: What are some resources that you would recommend for someone with a script who was looking to take that next step on the road to creating a title?

JMA: Ok, shameless plug time:

You can check out my blog, The Afrosoul Chronicles on WordPress. There you can see how I promote my work and my ongoing commentary on the comic book industry in general.

Also, you can cop my book Manifesto: The Tao of Jiba Molei Anderson, which is an art/education book on my time in the industry. That bad smoker can be found on Amazon and DriveThruComics.com as well as Lulu.com Of course, please pick up The Horsemen: Divine Intervention, The Horsemen: The Book of Olorun and The Horsemen: Mark of the Cloven. All of these titles and more from my company, Griot Enterprises, can be purchased in print through Amazon and IndyPlanet, as well as digitally through DriveThruComics.

Finally, go to your local comic book store and check out what's on the shelves, not as a consumer, but rather as a market researcher. Pick five books that you normally wouldn't buy. See what the commonalities are in terms of packaging and quality. What are the differences that set them apart from the rest of the pack? Don't go for the obvious choices. Do some real exploration of the medium. That will teach you more about this game than anything I, or anyone else, could ever teach you.

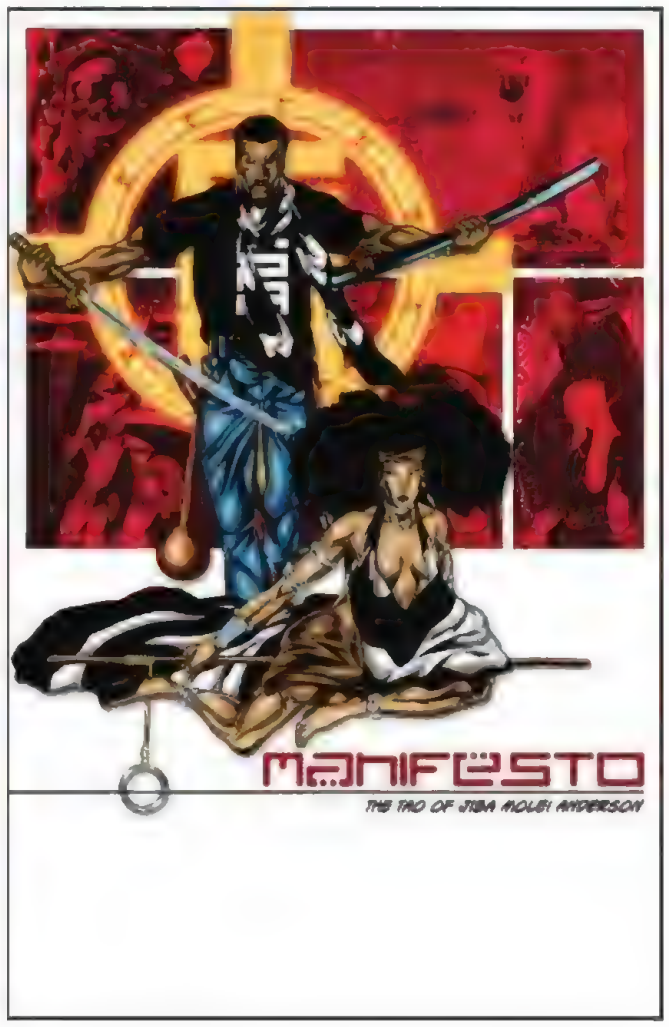
Good luck... I'm looking for some new cool comics to read!

Cheers!

Jiba Molei Anderson, MFA

Griot Enterprises

www.griotenterprises.com



Gene DeCicco

By: Mark Turner

Coming from The School of Visual Arts in Manhattan, New York, Gene DeCicco's resume features stints with Marvel Comics, Image Comics, Simon & Schuster, and Motown Records. He has done animation work for J.J. Sedelmaier Productions, Saturday Night Live, The Colbert Report, Tums, Alltell Wireless, the San Francisco Zoo, Reach Toothbrush, Outback Steakhouse, and many more. Armed with incredible talent and his personal philosophy: "If it's possible, just do what you love, take chances, even if you're terrified, it's better to go for it than to look back and never had taken the shot... also, surround yourself with good people, a support system is the basis for everyone who makes it… it is a guaranteed formula for success," Mr. DeCicco shows why he is counted among the industry's best. He recently took time out to talk with SP! Magazine about the importance of artistic training, his current projects, industry inspirations and more.

SP!: You studied at The School of Visual Arts in Manhattan, New York under Klaus Janson and with some of the industry's best as your peers. What was it like coming up in that type of atmosphere? How important do you feel it is for artists to surround themselves with great talent and what role does it ultimately play in one's success?

GD: While attending the High School of Art and Design, also in Manhattan, New York, to begin my art career, I had to select a college. I have a one-track, obsessive mind and art was in my crosshairs. I was focused on a single long-term goal, which was to work in commercial art. I am also a practical person, and The School of Visual Arts was a train ride away from my home in Greenpoint (Brooklyn). I only applied to one college. I wanted to draw for the rest of my life. I received a partial scholarship and a new chapter began in my life.

The atmosphere at SVA was very straightforward. You chose a major and focused on it. Aside from being obsessive, I am also an overachiever. This can be a detriment if you don't know how to rein it in. I was thrilled to attend SVA because it was one of the best schools for fine and commercial art on the East Coast. My over-ambitious goals were to learn everything I could about illustration, cartooning, animation, film, photography, and graphic design. The first disappointment in my adult life was finding out that college doesn't work that way. So I chose illustration and cartooning because, from what I surmised, I could afford paper and pencils, whereas cameras and computers cost money that my parents didn't have.

Having professors like Klaus Janson, Walter Simonson, Will Eisner, Carmine Infantino, Joe Orlando and Sal Amendola was like living a dream. I had read and admired all of their work for years and really had a rough time comprehending that they were now my professors. It was intense for me, because I was so inspired by their work.

I was fortunate enough to be classmates at SVA with some amazingly skilled illustrators. John Paul Leon and Shawn Martinborough top the list, along with William Rosado, Mike Penick, Chris Batista and Scott Cohn. They kept me on my toes, to say the least. I mention them by name because they were always focused on their craft; never wavering or distracted. It was a new challenge every week to maintain a craft level that was up to their standards. I wasn't always successful, ha. But it was one hell of a place to be. I knew these guys were going to be all over the industry. I admired them and was honored to be learning with them.

Being around such talented craftsmen was a great way to keep your skill level up. Like a horse race in super slow motion, but you get to study their form and technique as they pull forward from the pack as the race happens.

It's a pack mentality, in a way. If you're surrounded by such brilliance, you instinctively keep up. You bypass the fan perspective and desire to be in control of the craft that you are obsessed with. Drawing, composition, and storytelling always in constant flux; perspective, spotting blacks, and a tight commercial execution thrown into the mix… All of my classmates were and are masters at it. It did nothing but raise the bar every week we brought assignments in to view, study, critique, and learn from.

SP!: Who would you cite as some of your visual influences?

GD: My influences in comics were the legends of the medium. In the 80s it was the heavy hitters, the deities of the craft: Walter Simonson, John Byrne, Klaus Janson, Art Adams, Mike Mignola, Bill Sienkiewicz, Kent Williams, Frank

Miller, Mike Goldon, Brian Bolland, and Marc Silvestri.

In the late 80s and into the early 90s, I had a blast reading everything that Todd McFarlane drew. There was a lot of controversy in my attraction to his work while in college, because his work was so non-traditional, but I think that's what I enjoyed about it. It was fun. It was larger than life. It was unlike anything I had seen in comics. It was exciting to me. Similar to how Jim Carrey changed comedy around the same time, McFarlane changed the way comics were viewed. He knocked it out of the park with the webbing he drew for Spiderman and the fire for Ghost Rider. Also, his story telling wasn't what you'd expect from a comic book. And again, this is what was so exciting. You could never predict what he would do on a page… It was like seeing a live performance from a rock band.

I also was a fan of the Image crew. Erik Larsen's big and blocky work was fun; it was just all in your face. I'll get shit for this, because so was Liefeld's work in the beginning. I'm not going to pretend that it wasn't a fresh perspective on something that was always the same. Please note, I said 'in the beginning'. There are things that I heard happened on New Mutants in the late 80s that I feel were wrong, but that's a different story for another time. Not for me to tell. I can feel the eyes of the traditionalists rolling back into their heads. I remember having discussions at SVA that if it's not drawn correctly or perfectly, it's not good comics. I am cursed with the belief that if art can evoke an emotion from you, then it's art. Whether it's positive of negative. The worst art in any medium or industry is the art that elicits no reaction. Not if it's perfect and not the standard. But if it makes you feel something—and these artists did—then it's a good thing. People were talking and debating and arguing and communicating. It was exciting. I recall great round table discussions in all of my classes about the industry and the work that was coming out.

The amazing newcomer Jim Lee, the integral Whilce Portacio and the almighty Larry Stroman, the genius that is Brian Stelfreeze, the sickening Joe Quesada, and the brilliant Jae Lee were titans in comics too for me. Their work too was incredibly drafted, but had this playful, fantastic vibe that leapt off the page. And fooled you into believing that you could do it too… ha! That is another sign of great art to me: if it looks easy to do. Only the best make it look that way; beyond deceptive.

Today the guys that are on top of my list are Mike Oeming, JP Kalonji, Doug TenNapel and Sanford Greene. The shorthand of having a tight graphic execution—to me it's the essence of great comics. I still love all those I mentioned earlier. But, like all things, my taste has evolved in what excites me about art.

SP!: You've worked in comics (for Marvel, Image and others) as well as animation (J.J. Sedelmaier Productions). How different is it working in the two mediums? Do you feel that it has helped your career being disciplined in both and do you ever find one influencing the other in your work?

GD: Yes, animation has improved my ability to draw and 'move' the figure on a page and in a panel. For years, I was (again) obsessed with the perfect figure. And it was always out of reach, because each artist studies how to draw the figure and surrounding objects to persuade the reader to be pulled into the story. Many or most comic artists draw realistic figures, because they want that seriousness in their work. It's a sign of respect and shows that they don't take their craft lightly. While doing animation for JJ Sedelmaier, I met animators who approached drawing differently. It was about design and movement. It was about moving the story forward, not about how

perfect the figures were. This was a glaring difference that I fell in love with, being an 80s kid who grew up on animation and comics simultaneously. I learned that Disney changed the way they animated their characters talking, based upon how well Jim Henson (my personal creative hero) made the Muppets talk and move the story forward. The mouth doesn't have to enunciate every single word. The Muppets didn't have articulated lips and therefore, logistically, should be failures when it comes to communicating complicated dialogue right? Wrong. They are even more effective, because Henson learned that when someone speaks no one is focused on their lips. I learned from animation that this was what I wanted in my work. I wanted a type of shorthand that was dynamic and fun in my work to move the stories along. Perfect figures to me became a bit boring and typical of the format of comics. It just wasn't me. As a matter of fact, until recently, I have been holding back. I have been afraid to just do what I do. I think too much about my peers and about how I will be perceived by them. But, as of this interview, everything has changed. Everything…

SP!: You are currently working on The Rock Thrower over at New Paradigm Studios (home of the popular Watson and Holmes series). What attracted you to this project? What is it about? Who makes up the creative team? Will it be available in print, digital, or both? What do you think makes this a great title fit for New Paradigm Studios? How did you become involved with the project?

GD: I met New Paradigm Studios publisher and illustrator/CGI artist Brandon Perlow in college. He was a mastermind of science fiction illustration, and all illustration. He didn't just appreciate it, he lived it. He was like a mad scientist. He was full of ideas. He always had something to say. He was like a comic creation. A tall, big guy who was spry and wild… like a Jackson Pollack painting… shit flying everywhere, but it made sense if you just listened to him. Brandon was easy to be friends with, because he was very open to discussion and he told me I could draw. I guess if he told me I was a dick, I wouldn't have hung out with him, haha. And he makes sure to surround himself with those he sees good things in.

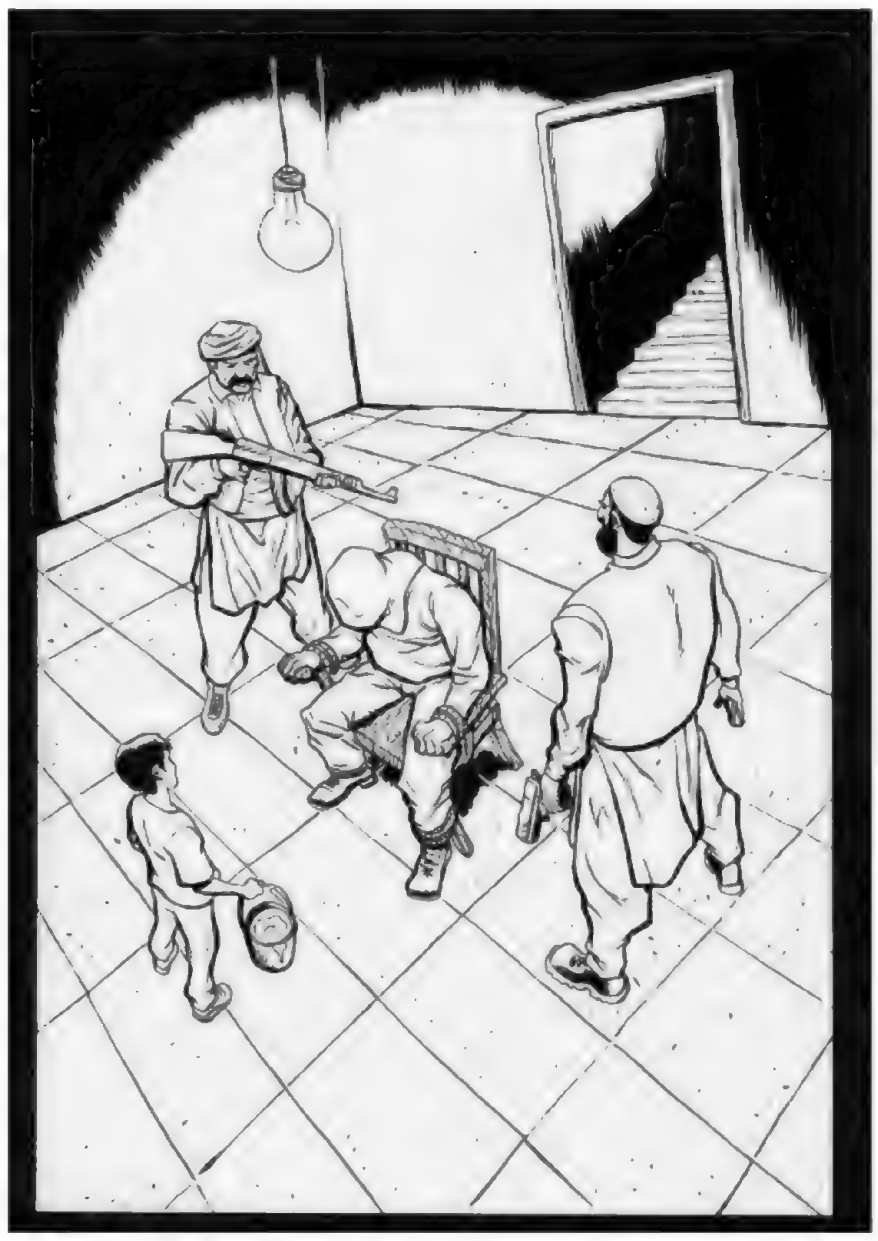
The Rock Thrower was something that Brandon told me about a few years ago. It's a 'dramedy' about a washed-up baseball scout for a major league team who is drowning his sorrows at a local bar and sees a kid on TV in Palestine, who is throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers and hitting them in the head with amazing precision and power. This scout, Dave, does have a knack for finding talent, and he thinks this kid is worth checking out, as a last ditch effort to save his career. So, he journeys to Palestine to meet and try to recruit the kid. And the shit hits the fan….

Brandon wanted the layouts of artist Dave Ross with my finishes and zipatones to give the book an authentic feel, brilliantly complimented with the beautiful painted colors of Ivan Santillan. It's a gritty real-life tale written by Karl Bollers, which needed something specific for the finishes. Dave Ross is an amazing story teller, and his work is slick and tight. I did a super-fast sample for Brandon and Senior Editor Justin Gabre over the loose and very light layouts of Gus Vasquez, who did the first nine pages for Issue 1. I mean, I took a brush pen and just messed around over these beautiful layouts on a light-box. This was after I tried to "ink" them like a traditional inker would and Brandon was bored. He asked me to just do what he was seeing in the drawings on Facebook I had been posting for a while. Those drawings were random brushed explosions of the new direction I wanted my work to go in.

So, I just didn't think. It's counter-intuitive, but I do my best work when I just play on the page. This is because I overthink. I think about drawing all day long. I study everything I see, to capture it in my mind when I don't have the time to draw it. I study people and their movements, gestures, clothing, anatomy, facial expressions, etc., to the point to where it is exhausting. So, when it's time to put it on the page, it comes out naturally. I do use references, but to keep things authentic, not to draw them perfectly. And so, they loved what I did and they asked me if I wanted to do it and I did. Because I love stories that are different. Superheroes are done to death; audiences love them; they're our modern mythology. For me, real-life-based stories are exciting, because heroes come in all shapes and sizes… and don't always wear spandex.

From what I know, the first three issues will be available online to read. Then The Rock Thrower will be collected as a graphic novel with the last two issues added in print only. It's a great read and so different from so much that is out there. That's what makes it a great property for New Paradigm Studios. Brandon and Justin aren't messing around. They want a new paradigm of storytelling in comics. It takes guts to do this in comics now. The industry is so vast. And to jump into that ocean with a single engine boat and a machete is ballsy and I love it.

The book was shared with a lot of pros and reps in San Diego and the vibe was that it has great potential to become a film or TV series. It's nothing like I have ever read before. Seeing



the printed version completed in readers' hands will be so exciting.

SP!: In terms of the action depicted in the story, baseball plays a major part. Do you find yourself using photo references to better capture the dynamic energy of pitchers?

GD: Yes, I use references, a lot of references. Too much at times; again, I'm obsessive. I try not to overuse it, as anything that looks too referenced loses its power as part of the story and becomes more about how that much reference is used.

Baseball is a great sport to capture in a series of drawings, because the movements of the players are so specific to the game. And the objects too… An outfielder's glove is used only in baseball. It's an odd-looking thing if you stop and study it. And take a good look at a catcher's mitt… that's some Jack Kirby craziness happening right there. But it's all designed for a working purpose, and those things are the most fun to replicate. Dave (Ross) lays out the gestures and he makes it fun. My job is to keep the energy that Dave lays down and keep the ink lines exciting. Then I do zipatones over the entire page. Ivan uses the zips to help him with where the lighting is and mood of each page. Dave is brilliant and Ivan is a master. They make me look like I know what I'm doing, ha!

SP!: Issue number one is currently available digitally. Are there any considerations that you must take into account when creating for this format, as opposed to print? How much does this affect your work process?

GD: The only thing I have to do is make sure I scan the finishes as a higher dpi: between 400 and 600. This is so the reader can zoom in to see the art on their computer. Normally, with anything that's for internet posts, you don't need such a high dpi, but the readers want to go panel-by-panel closely, which simulates holding the comic in your hand. Other than that, everything is else is normal comic production.

SP!: You also currently have a creator-owned effort titled Mystic Creatures. Could you tell us what is about? Where did the idea come from? Will this be an ongoing or a limited series?

GD: Yes I do. Mystic Creatures is my creator-owned project. In a nutshell, I would describe it as Star Wars and Lord of the Rings meets Pulp Fiction and The Dark Crystal.

The idea came from a moment in my life when I was in a bad place. I didn't see where I belonged and had no direction. I had things to work out personally and didn't know where to hide to wallow in my misery. So, I began sketching monsters and creatures, bounty hunters and aliens. I love odd things, as many comic artists do. The act of drawing was making me feel better. They weren't amazing drawings, but they had energy and were exciting to me. That was enough to get me to begin to grab the rope and hoist my butt out of the pit of despair I had allowed myself to fall into. In retrospect, if everyone you love is healthy and you have a roof over your head, then anything else is just a challenge to overcome.

The story is a futuristic tale. The sun is fading away and the Earth is becoming a ball of ice and snow. Aliens have come to supposedly help what's left of the human race, but they take over, because humans are inferior. The best way to make a living is to be a freelance bounty

hunter or, if you're lucky, to be a hunter for a corporation.

Our main character comes from nothing. Has a job hunting and finds out that surviving is just enough at times. But there is no way to win for some. Not everyone wins, and in fact, most beings don't. Like "What if Earth became like the ice planet Hoth from the Star Wars films?" I remember as a kid how wild and amazing the idea of an "ice planet" was. And for me, winter, although necessary, is the harshest season. It represents death to me. All of the funerals I have attended in my life were in the depths of winter. Not usually in the spring or summer. And snow and ice are fun to draw. J

I have planned to make it a 12-issue limited series. I like stories that end with the potential for more stories in that universe, but just something finite. So I know the specific tale is wrapped up and the reader can digest it.

SP!: I noticed that you were responsible for the story, pencils, inks, and color on the first issue. That is quite the undertaking. What kind of perspective does wearing so many hats on a story provide you that you may not have had before? What part of the experience did you learn the most from? Is this going to be the role you will play in upcoming issues?

GD: Yes, I did almost everything. My buddy and comics creator Wilson Ramos from Section 8 Comics did the lettering and assisted me by doing flat tones of color. Doing it all is exhausting, fun, but very exhausting… as I give everything I can to what I do, and when you're doing it all alone, something will not be what you want as time runs out… I would like to have had help with the story and dialogue, but that costs money, and so I'll do it. I'm not a heady writer who reads everything they can get their hands on. I just don't have the time, being a father and husband. I love comics, but they absorb your time like a sponge in a glass of water. It just disappears. This interview is just talking about comics and it takes a lot of time, haha. I love it, so I give it all my time. But this wears on your other responsibilities… so I do my best.

The first issue was drawn a while ago, actually. The first three issues will be out soon. The challenge I found was once the first issue was out, I was being offered work that I wanted to do… so the book is anchored for a little bit, as I am doing all of it alone.

SP!: Would you say this title is more of a fantasy or more of a sci-fi influenced story? Were there any influences from any given genre that influenced the look of the book?

GD: It's a mash-up of sci-fi and fantasy. I think that's what I loved about Star Wars as a kid. It was a perfect blend of the spiritual and the sci-fi adventure story. But then there are films like Pulp Fiction, The Departed, Aliens, The Terminator, and Lord of the Rings that were right on the money for the genre and that is thrown into the recipe.

The look of the book I wanted to be on its own. Mike Oeming's work was so inspiring, with Doug TenNapel and J.P. Kalonji too, I just wanted the book to have a cartoony edge with decent drawing. I needed speed… an economic style that gave me the time to get it done and give the story what it needed. Also, when I drew the original first three issues, I was working on just getting it done. It's independent-looking. I didn't want it to look like an overly-produced commercial comic. I was trying so very hard to not worry about drawing perfectly. I think I'm nuts because it's not commercial-looking. I have always loved artists and creators who did what they do, and didn't give a shit about the correct way to achieve a creative goal. Critical thinking and comic book making is what I tell myself…

What I love about comics is that they are very personal. If you're doing an independent book, you are alone at your table, just putting it all down. The minute you show someone and they give you feedback, the project is larger than you. I tried to keep Mystic Creatures quiet for a while, but I did show some people who I trusted. They seemed to dig it. It debuted in New York at the MoCCA (Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art) festival in 2011. I then was offered other work and I needed to pay my bills, so Mystic is on a break for now.

Currently I draw differently, so the newer issues of Mystic will be more modern visual language for me. It's more about movement, and the story… and also doing it in black and white will save time and cost.

SP!: Where can folks find this title? Any plans as to when the second issue will be out?

GD: The first issue can be bought at: http://www.indyplanet.com/front/?product=69357#!prettyPhoto.

Or email me at genedecicco@yahoo.com.Or just go to indyplanet.com and search Mystic Creatures.

The second issue will be out this coming fall. The hiatus is due to a flood of other projects that came after the first issue came out.

My website is gdecicco.com

And you can reach me at: http://www.free-lanced.com/genedecicco

SP!: Any other work you have in the pipeline currently? Will you be making any appearances during the convention season that fans should keep an eye out for?

GD: I am working on a comic for The Mother Duck Art Company. The book is called Gunman: Hired Gun, Sex Symbol. It's a comic about a robot/cyborg that kills villains and gets all the ladies. He uses every and any firearm in the world at his disposal. It's over the top and out of the box. The box is kind of shot to hell and anything goes. The book is more for mature readers or anyone who can handle over-the-top violence with giant robots, deadly lizard women, and chaos abounding. It's a blast to draw, I get to use more zipatones, and I do the lettering too. It's going to be a one-shot around 100 pages. So you can buy it and have the entire collection in one book, ha. I also did the pencils for a ten-page Star Trek preview for Prestige comics. It will be inked by Keith Smith and colored by Bill Lunsford. And their other projects I can't discuss at the moment, but will share with you once I have clearance from the publishers.

Glenn Tippett

Glenn Tippett Talks Tactix (Scare Tactix Graphics, that is!)

By: Ellen Fleischer

Glenn Tippett is the publisher and creator of Scare Tactix Graphix. He and his company create posters, comic books, T-shirts, and calendars, mostly for the horror and sci-fi genres, but also humorous and sexy. SP! caught up with Glenn this month to ask him a few questions.

SP!: How did you get into comics? Was this something that you always saw yourself doing?

GT: I started to read comic books as a youngster. I began with Harvey and Archie comics and progressed into DC, Marvel... whatever the newsstand carried. I collected and was a huge fan into my forties, but I am the world's worst artist, so even when I thought about creating stories or characters, I never really thought I could it. Then I went to the Sundance Film Festival and saw American Splendor. (Wow! You mean I can just hire an artist to do one of my ideas?!) Well, I had met many professionals at numerous comic cons and started asking them about doing a funny poster. As I had never done anything like this before, no one took me seriously. Finally, I had a friend tell me about an artist who got flooded out of his home in Florida and needed cash, so I produced my first posters. The posters and the ideas behind the posters were well-received and I then had an idea for a comic book and things just blossomed from there.

SP!: Who would you say have been your biggest influences—not necessarily with regard to your craft?

GT: The biggest influences would be Mad Magazine, Chiller Theater, Creature Feature, all movies and books, American culture... I love to absorb it all turn it sideways and create characters and stories.

SP!: Was there one piece of advice that you're glad you were given or wish someone had given you when you were getting started?

GT: The advice I wish I'd known right away is, "It's marketing, stupid!" If you can't get your products in front of consumers, you limit your growth greatly.

SP!: What prompted you to found Scare Tactix Graphix?

GT: I like to create characters and stories that can stand alone in a single issue but have room to evolve in the future. I really like horror and sci-fi, because you can tell a tight story and at the same time create a character you can bring back in the future.

SP!: What do you look for in a Scare Tactix Graphix submission?

GT: We specialize in horror and sci-fi stories and posters but are willing to try anything that we think is original and clever.

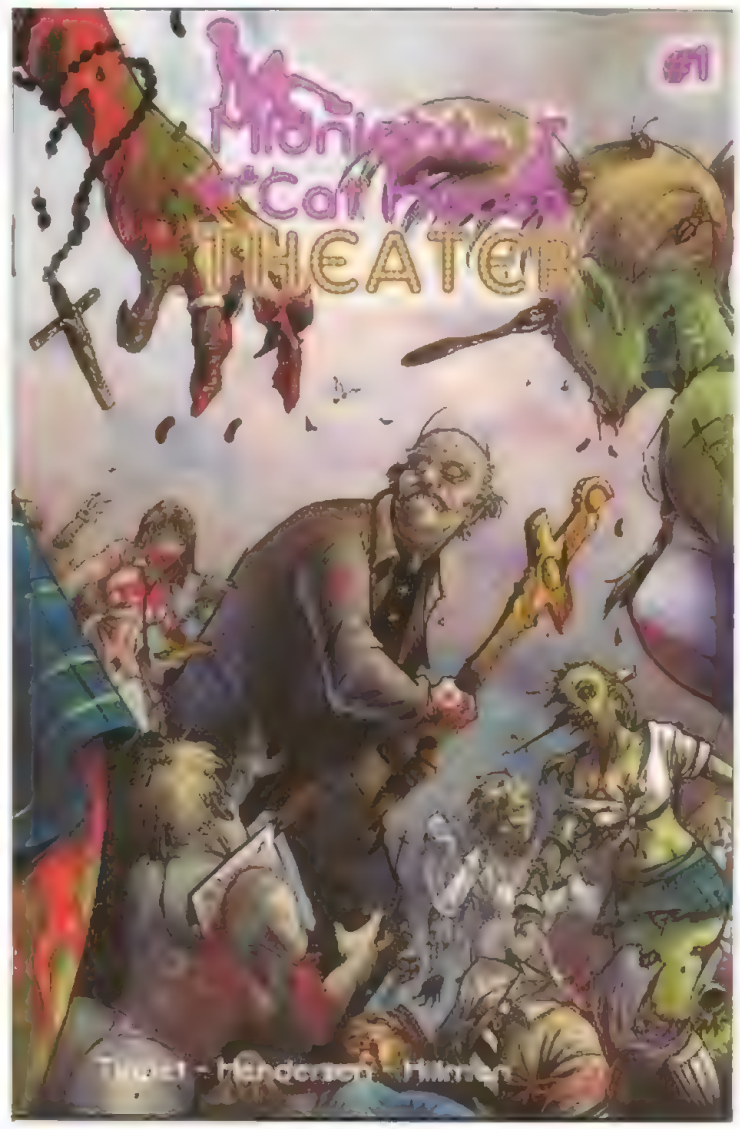
SP!: Let's discuss some of Scare Tactix's current titles. What can you tell us about Billy the Monster Hunter?

GT: Billy the Monster Hunter is an eight-year-old boy who can take any childhood toy and use it as a device to destroy monsters. It is kid-friendly. The creator and writer is a friend I met in Chicago, R.H. Rusef. He had an idea for Billy, we made some adjustments to the character,

and I have so far printed three issues with a fourth on the way.

SP!: Next up, there's Black Dawn, which looks like it has a more mature readership in mind?

GT: Black Dawn is a story of teenagers on a planet where the sun kills. It is written for a somewhat more mature audience I let the creators publish #1 under Scare Tactix Graphix, and they have since moved it to a web comic book.



SP!: How about Graveyard Girl and Kyu-Shin?

GT: I was happy to be the publisher of Graveyard Girl.

Graveyard Girl sits and stares. She knows she's dead and no one cares.

She is the last of her family to dies of the plague and she digs up friends to play with in the cemetery. It's very Gothic, with Dirk Strangely's very personal style. #2 will be coming this summer.

Kyu-Shin is an assassin from North Korea who was bitten by a vampire and became a protector of the weak. She is human, but has the power to summon the creatures of the gods.

SP!: Scare Tactix is also publishing your own stories. You released Destiny: Queen of Thieves in November 2012. What can you share with us about that one?

GT: Destiny: Queen of Thieves is about a thief who looks like a super model and lives like Donald Trump. She sets up other thieves that come to New York and, as they run for their lives or freedom, steals everything they own and looks good doing it. I used Marissa Jade's likeness for the character and would love for it to be a video game.

SP!: Last July, you gave us Mystery at the Cathouse Theater, which included the story "The St. Francis School for Zombie Girls". Let's talk about that.

GT: Midnight at the Cathouse Theater is an old burlesque theater that has been turned into a bordello for the dead. The madam of the house introduces stories of horror to entertain her clients. The first story is "The St. Francis School for Zombie girls. You have rich girls going to school with poor orphan girls. A rich girl gets bitten by a zombie. She's the daughter of a senator so they want to try to cure her, but must feed her. And what better to feed her but the poor orphan girls?

SP!: How have you been handling the marketing and promotion end of things?

GT: We have been a little weak there, but are looking to change that through Twitter, Facebook, and blogging, while updating our website more and running a lot of contests for free products. As well, we're planning a busy show schedule.

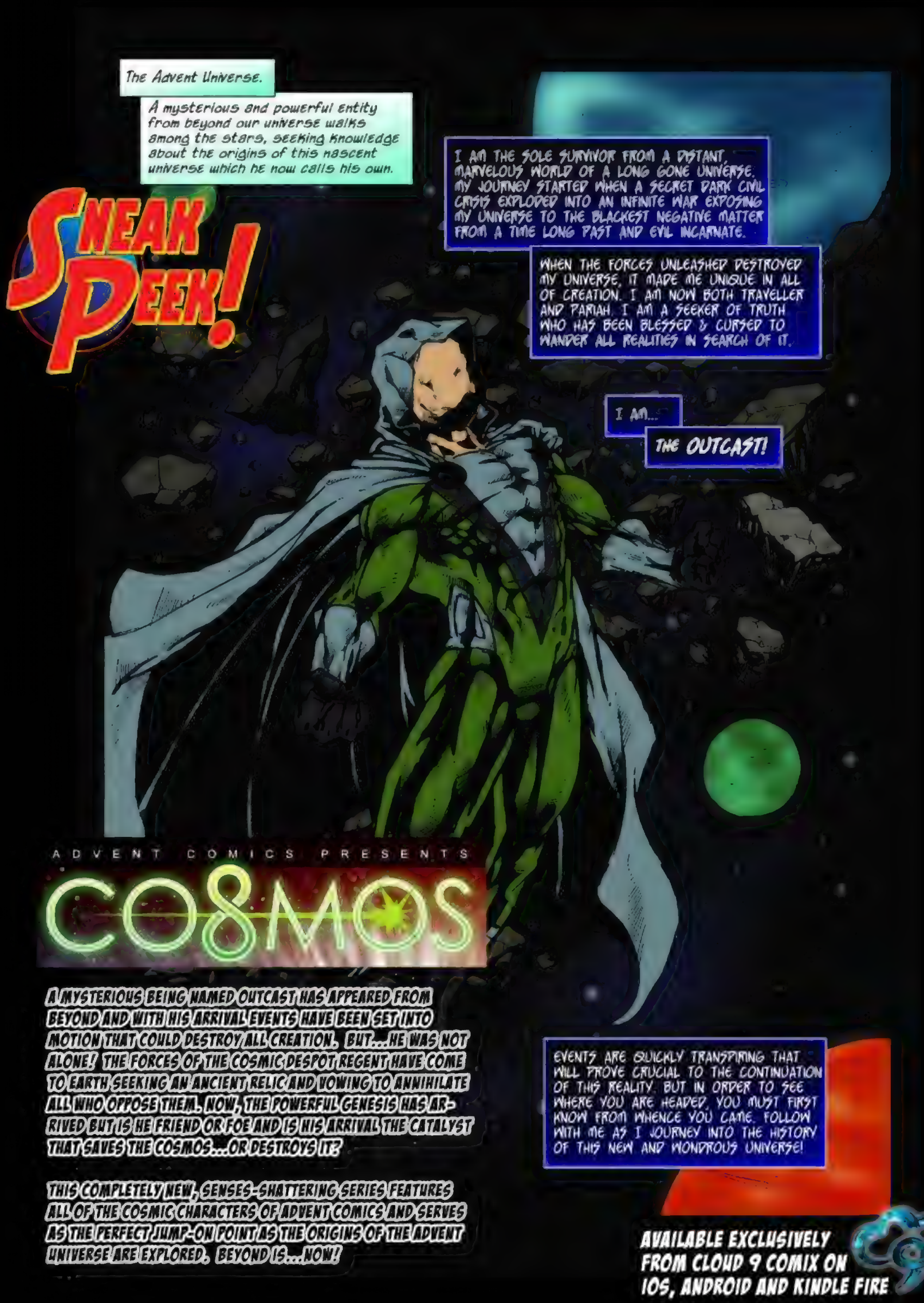
SP!: What's next on the horizon for you?

GT: I have a graphic novel by CJ Draden coming out, based on Pinocchio and endorsed by Stan Lee. We'll be releasing a new Graveyard Girl. There will also be a new Billy the Monster Hunter, and a 2015 Marissa Jade sports calendar, plus posters, shirts etc.

SP!: How can folks keep up with you and your projects?

GT: You can follow us on the Twitter or Facebook for scaretactixgraphix or visit our web site, www.scaretactixgraphix.com.

ZEIN
DRAGO BENTLEY
TRAIL
WINTER CITY
EXPERIENCE
THE ALL NEW
CLOUD 9 COMIX
ON IOS,
ANDROID &
KINDLE FIRE
E FELLOWSHIP OF THE GALLOWS
THE MIGHTY TITAN
NN WARRIORS
DYNAGIRL
INFINITY2 6
CLOUD
COMIX


The Advent Universe.
A mysterious and powerful entity from beyond our universe walks among the stars, seeking knowledge about the origins of this nascent universe which he now calls his own.
SNEAK PEEK!
I AM THE SOLE SURVIVOR FROM A DISTANT, MARVELOUS WORLD OF A LONG GONE UNIVERSE. MY JOURNEY STARTED WHEN A SECRET DARK CIVIL CRISIS EXPLODED INTO AN INFINITE WAR EXPOSING MY UNIVERSE TO THE BLACKEST NEGATIVE MATTER FROM A TIME LONG PAST AND EVIL INCARNATE.
WHEN THE FORCES UNLEASHED DESTROYED MY UNIVERSE, IT MADE ME UNIQUE IN ALL OF CREATION. I AM NOW BOTH TRAVELLER AND PARIAH. I AM A SEEKER OF TRUTH WHO HAS BEEN BLESSED & CURSED TO WANDER ALL REALITIES IN SEARCH OF IT.
I AM...
THE OUTCAST!
ADVENT COMICS PRESENTS
COSMOS
A MYSTERIOUS BEING NAMED OUTCAST HAS APPEARED FROM BEYOND AND WITH HIS ARRIVAL EVENTS HAVE BEEN SET INTO MOTION THAT COULD DESTROY ALL CREATION. BUT...HE WAS NOT ALONE! THE FORCES OF THE COSMIC DESPOT REGENT HAVE COME TO EARTH SEEKING AN ANCIENT RELIC AND VOWING TO ANNIHILATE ALL WHO OPPOSE THEM. NOW, THE POWERFUL GENESIS HAS ARRIVED BUT IS HE FRIEND OR FOE AND IS HIS ARRIVAL THE CATALYST THAT SAVES THE COSMOS...OR DESTROYS IT?
THIS COMPLETELY NEW, SENSES-SHATTERING SERIES FEATURES ALL OF THE COSMIC CHARACTERS OF ADVENT COMICS AND SERVES AS THE PERFECT JUMP-ON POINT AS THE ORIGINS OF THE ADVENT UNIVERSE ARE EXPLORED. BEYOND IS...NOW!
EVENTS ARE QUICKLY TRANSPIRING THAT WILL PROVE CRUCIAL TO THE CONTINUATION OF THIS REALITY. BUT IN ORDER TO SEE WHERE YOU ARE HEADED, YOU MUST FIRST KNOW FROM WHENCE YOU CAME. FOLLOW WITH ME AS I JOURNEY INTO THE HISTORY OF THIS NEW AND MONDROUS UNIVERSE!
AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FROM CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

PROLOGUE I

WASHINGTON, D.C.

I... WILL NOT... FALL!

DARK AMERICAN, YOUR TIME HAS COME! ALTHOUGH YOU HAVE FOUGHT BRAVELY, BOTH YOU AND YOUR WORLD NOW LIES IN TOTAL RUIN.

SNEAK PEEK!

YOU... WILL BE STOPPED!

MAYBE ONE DAY BUT IT WILL NOT BE YOUR HANDS THAT DO SO. AS BEFITTING A WARRIOR OF YOUR STATURE, I WILL SEE THAT YOUR DEATH SHALL BE SWIFT!

FUC....

CRA-ACK

TAKE SOLACE THAT YOU DO NOT DIE ALONE, FOR YOUR UNIVERSE GOES WITH YOU!

AS THE MYSTERIOUS WARRIOR TELEPORTS AWAY...

...EARTH IS DESTROYED!!

AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FROM CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

SNEAK PEEK!

MEANWHILE IN THE FAR-FLUNG FUTURE OF THE 49TH CENTURY, WE FIND THE INSTITUTE OF CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY. THIS TEMPORAL OUTPOST IS BETTER KNOWN AS "TIPPING POINT" AND IT IS THE HOME OF ONE VERY SPECIAL PERSON...

NEO, MASTER OF TIME!

MAN, THE FUTURE BITES!

MASTER NEO, YOU DO REALIZE THAT THE FUTURE IS A QUANTIFIER OF TIME THAT THEORETICALLY WILL NEVER ARRIVE WITH AN EXAMPLE BEING THE WORD, TOMORROW? AS SUCH, IT CANNOT PERFORM ANY ACTION SUCH AS BITING.

IT'S AN ANCIENT 20TH CENTURY COLLOQUIALISM LIKE "GOOFBALL"... BUCKETHEAD! IF YOU ASK ME, I THINK YOU NEED TO TAKE A DAY OFF AND TAKE US ALL TO THE MAGNO RACES ON ARCTURUS IV.

THIS IS SERIOUS, TOCK! I MAY BE THE APPOINTED GUARDIAN OF TIPPING POINT AND THE TIME SLED, BUT EVEN I GET BORED

I TAKE IT THAT YOUR RECENT ADVENTURES IN THE PAST ARE WHAT PROMPTED THE CHANGE IN ATTITUDE.*

NOTHING EVER HAPPENS HERE! ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!

*NEO WAS ONE OF THE HEROES WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE EVENTS OF CHAMPIONS OF HOPE - TK

THAT IS DEFINITELY THE CORRECT PHRASE TO DESCRIBE... THAT!!

BLAZING PULSARS!! ARE WE UNDER ATTACK? THIS HAS TO BE THE WORK OF MAXIM OR TIMELORD!

UNLESS EITHER OF THEM HAVE LEARNED HOW TO TRANSPORT ENTIRE SOLAR SYSTEMS, I DON'T THINK SO.

AS ASHAMED AS I AM TO ADMIT IT, I CONCUR WITH TOCK. TIPPING POINT'S CHRONO AND SPATIAL SENSORS INDICATE THAT DUE TO A DISRUPTION IN THE TIMESTREAM, THE UNIVERSE IS GONE!

AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FROM CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

SNEAK PEEK!

GONE WHERE?! AND WHY AREN'T WE GONE WITH IT?

THAT'S NOT GOING TO HAPPEN! COME ON, WE HAVE TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS!

TIPPING POINT IS LITERALLY POISED AT THE VERY END OF TIME IN A POCKET OF CHRONOSYNCHRONOUS REALITY! WE ARE TECHNICALLY IMMUNE AS LONG AS WE RESIDE WITHIN TIPPING POINT.

IS THERE ANY WAY WE CAN TRACK WHERE THE TIME DISTURBANCE ORIGINATED FROM?

TRACKING SENSORS HAVE NARROWED IT DOWN TO THE 21ST CENTURY, SPECIFICALLY WITHIN 24 HOURS OF THE EVENT. MASTER NEO, THERE IS A REMOTE CHANCE THAT THE TIMESTREAM CAN BE REPAIRED AND THAT THE UNIVERSE CAN BE RESTORER

SOMETHING TELLS ME THAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO GET YOUR WISH FOR MORE ACTION.

FOR THAT TO HAPPEN, I HAVE TO FIX THIS!! ALL EXISTENCE MUST BE SAVED AND I KNOW JUST HOW TO GO ABOUT IT.

CARE TO SHARE THE WEALTH, BOSS?

WE'RE GOING TO USE THE TIME SLED TO JOURNEY BACK TO THE 21ST CENTURY AND STOP THE DISTURBANCE! BUT FIRST, WE HAVE TO PUT THE BAND BACK TOGETHER AGAIN!

AS NEO AND HIS COMPANIONS EMBARK UPON THEIR TIME-TRAVELING JOURNEY, TIPPING POINT IS ENVELOPED IN A WAVE OF PURE ENERGY LEAVING BEHIND ONLY THE VOID OF NOTHINGNESS!

AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FROM CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

PRESENT DAY, EARTH'S MOON.

MOON BASE ALPHA - A TOP SECRET UNITED STATES JOINT RESEARCH FACILITY/ SECURITY OUTPOST DEVELOPED BY NASA AND PROJECT HOMELAND

INSIDE OF THE EXPANSIVE COMMAND ROOM, THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THIS FACILITY GO ABOUT CARRYING OUT THEIR VARIOUS DUTIES INCLUDING LUNAR EXPLORATION.

COMMAND TO ROVER 1. COME IN ROVER 1 COMMANDER.

ROVER COMMANDER WILDFIRE HERE, COMMAND WE ARE STILL ENROUTE TO REPAIR THE MAIN RADAR TOWER. WHAT IS SO IMPORTANT, CAPTAIN MAYHEW?

TELEMETRY SHOWS AN UNKNOWN COSMIC ANOMALY HEADING DIRECTLY TOWARDS YOUR LOCATION. WHATEVER IT IS, THE POWER READINGS HAVE SPIKED OFF THE GRID

COPY THAT. WE WILL KEEP OUR EYES OPEN FOR--

WHOA!

COMMANDER WILDFIRE REPORT.

YOUR ANOMALY JUST MADE ITSELF KNOWN.

THE ENERGY SIGNATURE THAT YOU HAVE BEEN SEARCHING FOR STANDS REVEALED, EARTHLING.

SNEAK PEEK!

AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FROM CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

Michael Jantze

It's a Serious World. Someone Has to Make Fun of It!

By: Louise Cochran-Mason

When asked to describe himself and his job history, Michael Jantze states, *"I've worked in animation, visual effects, web and new media, journalism, filmmaking, professoring and parenting, but I'm probably Googled most for my comic strip "The Norm"... or that misspelled swimwear company."*

He is well known for "The Norm," a syndicated newspaper comic strip which he now self-publishes. He was working as a journalist when it was first syndicated. He taught animation and sequential art at the Savannah College of Art and Design, and is now developing his own "Taught by a Pro" course. He has worked as an art director at, among other places, Industrial Light and Magic. He has done corporate and entertainment print and film art (for clients like YouTube, Burger King, Marketoon Studios, Pixel Farm studios, and Hilton Hotels). And, he is not affiliated with Jantzen Apparel, LLC.

SP! finds out more.

SP!: When did you first start creating comic strips?

MJ: I began creating comics in earnest in college. I had a published strip at each of the colleges I attended. One of those strips was titled Normal State and blatantly and shamefully ripped off Doonesbury. After college, I self-published a continuation of the strip and titled it Normal u.s.a.

SP!: Did The Norm follow on from Normal State/ Normal u.s.a. in terms of characters and stories?

MJ: The Norm didn't use characters or stories from the Normal features. I had developed Normal u.s.a. with two different syndicate editors without a resulting launch into newspapers. So I took a year off to work on some other projects and The Norm grew out of the daily cartoon journal I kept. In fact, that's why the strip featured Norm talking to the reader… to mimic the style of my journal.

SP!: You were working as a journalist when The Norm was syndicated.

MJ: When I applied for a news graphic artist position, I had it in the back of my mind that it wouldn't hurt to "know" my eventual client, the newspaper editor. I worked for a lot of wonderful editors, but I don't think it increased my chances of successful syndication, in the end. And working at a paper didn't really help with syndication. I had already been dealing with King Features on my first submission, a few years before I took the news graphics job.

SP!: Can you tell me some of the publications The Norm was published in?

MJ: Seattle, Los Angeles, Orange County, several papers in the San Francisco Bay Area, Denver, Detroit, Atlanta, Dallas, etc. The Norm was sold to about 75 papers in seven countries and three or four languages, depending on how you feel about British English and American English.

SP!: What made you decide to change from working with a syndication company to self-publishing The Norm?

MJ: In a word, money. It's obviously more complicated than that, but essentially the business model for syndication is over, kaput. I retired the strip to get back to writing some other projects, but the fan response was enormously emotional and my wife Nicole suggested I try an online model for a year. So in 2006, The Norm became a subscription-based online strip. We broke six figures and more than doubled the net income I was receiving from King Features. However, I got about six months into drawing the strip five days a week and felt a general sense of ennui about continuing set in (in hindsight, I should have done a Sunday-only strip, as I'm doing now). I asked my subscribers if it'd be cool to do a longer form story for 2007 and I did the Knocked Out Loaded storyline.

Providence interrupted all that when my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. Since then, it's been a long crawl out of 2007.

SP!: Do you retain full creator ownership when you work with a syndication company?

MJ: Yes, I do.

SP!: How do you find self publishing, as opposed to work for hire or syndication?

MJ: I've always been a DIY, entrepreneurial sort of person. Even in high school, I was producing 30-minute film spoofs of James Bond and Rocky films and charging admission for students in the school library (you could get out of study hall… for a price!). So self-publishing is something I'll always do, not as a last resort as much as a way to finish all

the stories I want to tell.

That said, I've had wonderful relationships with DC Comics, King Features, GoComics.com, and other partners over the years. When the project demands a wider audience than I can bring in, I go to the trouble to share my expenses and profits with the right partner.

SP!: Do you still do freelance work?

MJ: Yes. Always. I enjoy the variety of problems I get to solve. I'm currently working with an online learning company, a marketing company and two Fortune 500 corps. They bring problems that need story and character in the form of illustration or animation, so I get to try out some of the more fun or wild ideas. It's a lot of fun.

And I've been doing more and more illustration this past year. It's funny how there seem to be trends in where the paying customer comes from (oof, not sure that was a sentence, but I hope you get the idea). I'm working on some book illustration projects as well, early stages...

SP!: You've also developed lessons (Taught by a Pro) ?

MJ: Tom and Tony Bancroft are good friends of mine; I love those brothers. When I saw they were launching it, I actually wrote them and said "Hey!… ex-comics professor, am I in?" I've only had one lesson released, but I've filmed the next four and am currently editing them. It's not difficult to do the lessons; they're designed to be task-oriented, so it's more like a demo. You strike a core skill right in the heart and then show folks your angle on it. I taught animation and sequential art for four years at the Savannah College of Art and Design. Trust me, this is easy! I don't even have to use the word 'pedagogy' in a sentence.

SP!: You used to work for Industrial Light and Magic, doing visual effects and storyboards before leaving to work on your own projects full-time. Did you learn a lot about marketing and promotion while you were there?

MJ: No real lessons in marketing or promotion. I worked as a visual effects art director, so I was doing character design, prop design, environments, and storyboards, as well as working with teams of other artists to solve a director's visual problem.

SP!: Were there any copyright issues, as while you worked there, you were also working on The Norm in your own time?

MJ: No issues with copyright. For creative, you usually fill out a form of pre-existing works with a creative company or corporation that states the IP you claim as original to you.

SP!: Do you cover aspects of your job therein your Taught By A Pro lessons?

MJ: I'll be doing some Taught By A Pro lessons on character design, storyboards, etc., as I get to them. The first batch I'm working on is focused on comic strip creation.

SP!: Did they take The Norm Star Wars adventure in good humor?

MJ: LucasFilm did approach me at the SDCC and let me know they loved my "Norm sits in line for Ep 1" storyline. We've had a good relationship over the years. For instance, two years ago, I took a SCAD professor and four grad students to Star Wars Celebration in Orlando and we did sketches for kids in the family room. It was a blast(er)!

SP!: You have "Readeos" on Youtube. What gave you the idea?

MJ: "The Norm Comic Readeos" have been an evolution, and I'm not sure it's done evolving. My animation studio think tank has a mission statement to help brands tell engaging stories and to turn customers into fans.

SP!: Are these popular with your fanbase?

MJ: Motion comics were a big thing seven years ago and we were on the forefront of doing super short form motion comics (I called ours 'audio comics,' because they promised an experience more like an audio book than a motion book, whatever the hell that would be). The idea of "motion" is boring. Motion isn't animation and it's certainly not going to add much to a sequential experience.

I found that with my clients, animation was a reluctant choice, so we came up with the idea of combing the good parts of sequential storytelling (panel to panel, etc.) with the good stuff from film language (camera moves, etc.) and mixing it with a very small bit of character movement and a big helping of sound design. The idea being that the impression of the experience would leave a memory with much more fidelity than you actually saw and heard. Like a recipe… taste the ingredients alone: eh. But put them together and you get cake! Yum!

Motion comics take about a tenth of the time to create as animation (even limited animation) and it seemed like if a creator working alone wanted to offer their fans something that was personal, motion comics still weren't the answer.

So, as an experiment, I bled all the character animation and motion out of the motion comics and came up with something that takes one tenth the time of a motion comic to make. Something that maybe one person could make on their own.

I've now produced about 50 "The Norm Comic Readeos," and to be honest, I like them. You can watch them on your smart-phone, tablet, computer or HDTV!

Are they popular? I haven't been worried about that. I'm still in the middle of fine tuning the idea and may have time to find the right partner for them in the future.

SP!: Have you monetized your YouTube channel?

MJ: I have set up ads on my YouTube page, but 300 hits isn't going to bring in many pennies.

SP!: Last year you ran a very successful Indiegogo campaign in which you raised $27,399USD to far exceed the $7,500 Goal for your Knocked Out Loaded project. Can you tell us more about the project (process pages as well as Norm-related sketches from other professionals and young professionals)?

MJ: Ah. Back to "Knocked Out Loaded" or, as I'm now calling the project, the one who shall not be finished.

As I mentioned, the project was interrupted in 2007 and I decided it was time to set aside enough time to get it finished. I've again bit off more than I can chew. I was supposed to finish writing it in October 2013, but I just finished with the writing the first week of March 2014. I'm slowly working through the pencils and inks presently. And then on to colors, layouts, etc.

At this point, it's a labor of love. I hope to finish it within the year, but I'm going much slower as my studio work is back up to full speed for 2014. I'm now posting weekly (weakly, maybe) updates on my progress at the "Knocked Out Loaded" graphic novel page on Indiegogo.com. I'll finish. I always finish… just rarely first.

SP!: What made you decide to run a crowd-funding campaign?

MJ: I like the idea of crowd-funding. What a great way to get to be in touch with the people that most enjoy my work. I've always had such great supporters of "The Norm" and my work. I'm happy to share my talent and my stories with them directly.

SP!: What advice would you give to someone wanting to run a crowd-funding campaign?

MJ: The best advice is to be more than 80 percent done when you ask for crowd-sourcing funds. I was, but then I tore the third act of the book completely apart… and then that affected some pages earlier in the story… and suddenly I was back to 65 or 70 percent done and that's not the way to do it. You want a one-to-three-month cycle from funding to delivery to keep your contributors engaged and in the present.

SP!: You sell The Norm books through Nook, Amazon and iTunes. What can you tell us about that?

MJ: Those ebooks were created as examples for a class I taught on Comics in New Media. When I get to the new ebooks after Knocked Out Loaded, I think then I'll be able to talk about "real" e-publishing projects.

The print books I sell on Amazon are the remainders from the marketing King Features and I did ten years ago. Most of them are now out of print … I think the softback The Norm In Color Sunday collection and one The Norm Magazine are all that's left.

SP!: What are your hobbies?

MJ: I like to garden. Actually, I like to do big projects and pull weeds… but I'm going to call it gardening anyhow. I've been painting a lot more in the past year and I like small construction projects. My daughter and I built a doghouse last summer that the dogs hate. Perfect!

I've been putting all my garden finds on my Instagram.com/jantze account (along with a mostly daily sanity sketch). I've found a 12" G. I. Joe plastic buttocks, a toy American Indian, a Monopoly hotel, nails, glass, a plastic giraffe, a 1959 penny, and a professional fishing weight. It's hilarious!

SP!: Did you really grow up in a town called Normal?

MJ: I did. It's a twin city in Illinois with Bloomington, 100 miles south of Chicago. We're the home of ISU, State Farm Insurance, Beer Nuts, Laffy Taffy, actor McLean Stevenson, and Supreme Court Justice David Davis. As a college town, it was a riot to grow up in: so much to explore and do for being out in the corn and soybean fields of the Midwest.

WEBLINKS:

jantze.com

YouTube.com/jantzestudios

Facebook.com/jantzestudios

instagram.com/jantze

Taughtbyapro.com

Bryan Randall

Sitting down with Side-SWIPED artist and co-creator Bryan Randall

Article By: Jennifer "Scraps" Vanderbeek

Open with an artist, a villain in mind—a real piece of work with more than a few layers of nasty on him—but no one to thwart. Enter a writer with a cyber-punk duo of hacker and self-aware robot in need of a bad guy. Throw in liberal influences from Blade Runner, Ghost in the Shell, Neuromancer, a David Bowie song, and even a little "Doctor Who." In the hands of Park Cooper and Bryan Randall, these disparate elements combine to create the world and crisis of SWIPE.

Ray—username Ganymede—is a hacker in a post-war, not quite dystopian society. Karina is a robot working as a dancer in a strip club, who's recently gained self-awareness. After Karina helps out with a thug problem, Ray trades some pilfered information for the ownership of Karina and gets not only a sidekick but a true partner in crime, using her ability to memorize stripper moves as a deadly weapon. After rescuing a friend of Karina's and facing Randall's original creation (the Big and Shiny Heavily Armed Chick-Basher), the larger story opens up involving nanotechnology, cults, zombies, and how little it really takes to set off the machinations of a madman.

As a reader, this is not the sort of story I would usually seek out. Nonetheless, I found myself enthralled, watching as the robot gains more humanity, while the population as a whole loses theirs. And just when there didn't seem to be nearly enough pages to allow for a satisfying ending, the denouement comes about in a flash of self-awareness and personal integrity.

SWIPE was not the artist's first comic work. S.M.P. Unlimited tapped him to add visuals to Jason Collin's "Tarkiss: Destroyer of Souls," though he admits that SWIPE has enjoyed a much broader distribution since its release in 2013. Randall's art is almost frenetic in nature—the inspiration of Todd McFarlane ("Spawn"), Geoff Darrow ("Hard Boiled"), and Juan Jose Ryp ("Black Summer") is easy to see—which suits the world we enter in the pages of SWIPE.

After these two collaborative works and several outside gigs as a concept artist in both film and gaming applications, Randall sees his future projects as strictly solo. "Having to wait for the rest of the production process after I did… the penciling and inking… seemed to drag on and on. And while it was fun to work on, nothing is more fun than working on something that is entirely your own creation."

He describes his next project, Disintegration of Eden, as "a really crazy take on the whole creation myth". It represents a departure from the comic book format, incorporating rich illustrations into the prose. Taking

on the creation myth is a tall order and I asked Bryan to explain his take on it.

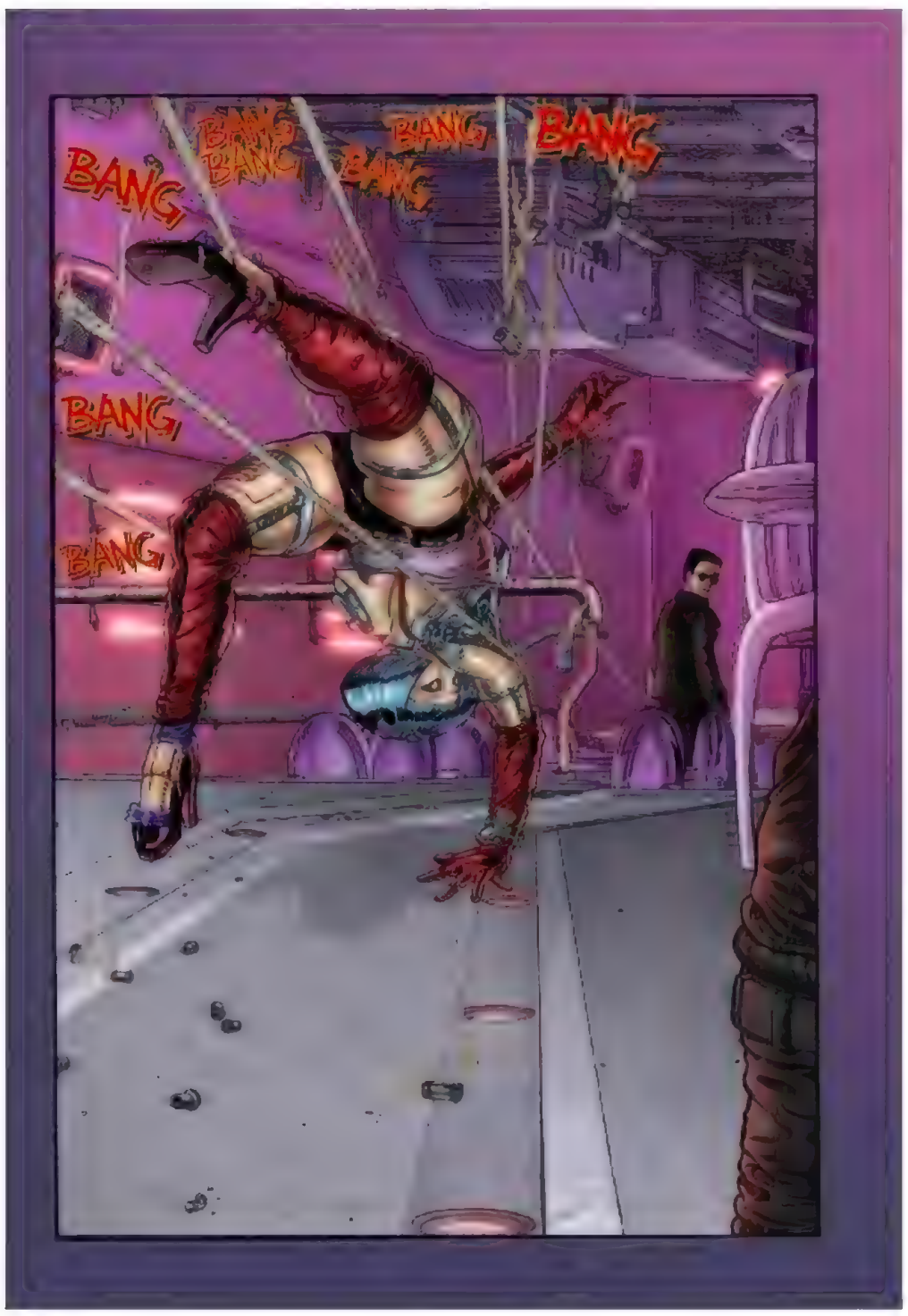
I have always been a believer in some type of eternal consciousness, permeating the universe, and over the years, I seem to have been gravitating more and more towards that in the work that I do. And I think this is a culmination of that which has seemed to almost become [its] own religion in my eyes. I believe my story will vastly differ [from others], because it covers a multitude of already-established scientific facts and religious [beliefs], and throws it all into a blender to create something nobody else has read. And my hope at the end of the day is to make at least a small handful of people begin to believe in something greater, if they otherwise have not.

The Life Bearer, from the upcoming Disintegration of Eden, shows not only the artists shift from traditional to digital art but also a true departure from his earlier influences.

That solo project will be a long time coming, though. Between the writing and the art—he's recently transitioned to digital production methods from the traditional style used in Tarkiss and SWIPE—Randall estimates that it may be a full decade before the book is complete. He has hope of turning it into a screenplay, with his art translating to storyboards. In the meantime, he intends to continue to build his art portfolio and produce prints of his work for sale.

SWIPE is published by Angry Viking Press, available for pre-order through Diamond Distributors, as well as by digital download via DriveThruComics.com. You can follow Randall's progress on Disintegration of Eden at his website, http://postdelugestudio.wordpress.com/

Jennifer Vanderbeek (formerly Walker) is the author and artist behind What to Feed Your Raiding Party, the comic book cookbook for gamers, as well as a freelance illustrator. She writes and draws from her home in Tallahassee, Florida.



--BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'VE NOTICED, RAY--
--BUT THIS ROBOT TAXI HAS STARTED DRIVING REALLY BADLY.
I WAS JUST STARTING TO WONDER ABOUT THAT, ACTUALLY--
--RIGHT AT ABOUT THE TIME YOU ASKED, BECAUSE OF HOW FAST WE TOOK THAT LAST CORNER--
WHOA!
EXIT

Susan Stuckey

By: Douglas Owen

Susan was born in the Midwest of the USA and was raised on a farm. She grew up around cats, dogs (coon hounds), cows, pigs, chickens, ducks, etc. The family home was surrounded by vegetable gardens, orchards, cornfields, wheat fields, creeks, and woods. Her closest neighbor, as the crow flies, was over a mile away.

She graduated from college multiple times, with different degrees and enough credit hours for even more degrees. In the midst of the college courses, she met and married her husband, and is still happily married, many years later.

Always an avid reader, she wrote her first fantasy story on an Apple 2E—and lost it when the computer died. She resumed her affair with writing when the "nest" emptied and has continued writing (off and on--usually off) up to the present day.

SP!: Describe the moment that launched you on your journey of becoming a writer.

SS: There wasn't an actual moment, but rather a point where when I'd finished reading a novel I thought: 'Wonder if I could write a good story?'

SP!: What would you consider to be the main influences on your writing?

SS: My family and the wonderful way I was raised. The values my parents instilled AND the example my parents set with their lives in living their values. My parents believed family was important and would not attend any social function where their children weren't welcome.

SP!: How instrumental is your support group (family, friends, and colleagues) in your writing career?

SS: Of my family and 'real life' friends, only my husband and son know I write. My son is kept busy with his family and career (military), but when he (unknown to me) downloaded and read one of my stories from Amazon and told me he really liked it, that was a thrill. He is a fantasy reader and pretty picky. My husband, even though he normally doesn't read fantasy, does read my stories and is my first reader. Without son and husband, I would have quit some time ago.

SP!: What were the most challenging aspects of bringing your books to life?

SS: I majored in business in college and have worked in business since then. Doesn't sound relevant, but the hardest thing was to learn to ignore ALL of the rules of business writing to write fiction. In particular, for this story, my challenge was writing the action/fight scenes—those are difficult for me.

SP!: What is the fundamental message you would like readers to walk away with after reading your work?

SS: Enjoyment rather than a message. Someone saying they enjoyed reading one of my stories is the best feeling ever. If there IS any message, it would be that having the courage and conviction of remaining true to your morals and beliefs is worth any price.

SP!: Who is your favorite character from your own writing? Describe an interesting moment in the development of this character.

SS: Don't really have a favorite character. The story I enjoyed writing the most was "Friends," because it is mostly light-hearted fun about friendship.

SP!: What was the most difficult scene for you to write? Try to describe your efforts without revealing too much or 'spoiling' the moment for future readers.

SS: The whole story really. The MC, Clovis, and the 'Battle of Stryker Pass' was referred to in several other of my stories and to get a handle on Clovis for a later story, I needed to write that tale, but Clovis is actually a very modest and retiring young man and really didn't want it told.

SP!: What have you found to be the most

challenging aspect of publicizing yourself and your work?

SS: That would be the 'selling'. I've always been a very private person and very quiet. I can push other people's stories/novels, but don't feel comfortable pushing mine.

SP!: What is the saddest thing you've encountered in your career?

SS: All of the people who are so willing to push negative things, both in their relations with others AND in their stories and novels.

SP!: What was the drive behind Kaserie's Choice?

SS: LOL. Years ago, when I first started writing fiction semi-seriously, another writer told me I'd never write anything worth reading. Kaserie's Choice was spurred by that comment, in an effort to prove the person wrong. Although it was, in my opinion, a destructive comment—and intended as a destructive comment—I now thank that person.

SP!: The cover art for your novelettes is really nice. Did you design it?

Novelette Blurb

BATTLE OF STRYKER PASS: An implacable enemy. A desperate stand. Stryker Pass is the last hope of Clovis Telmar's people to stop the invading Halurdow. Outnumbered six to one, the followers of the Twin Gods prepare for their ultimate battle, an all-or-nothing defense of the pass leading to the soft heart of all the Kalieri Kingdoms. Clovis Telmar, son of the Chief of the Wolf Clan, holds the key to the defense of Stryker Pass, but why should the anxious defenders follow the lead of a 12-year-old boy?

SS: Three were created by someone else. For the others, I did the covers and had someone else do the lettering, since one of the fonts used for part of the title is a font I can't afford to buy.

SP!: Will you be combining your novelettes into one novel or collection in the future?

SS: I am definitely considering it and probably will.

SP!: Have you attempted to publish traditionally?

SS: No.

SP!: Where do you see your writing in the next five years?

SS: Hopefully continuously improving – no one's writing is ever perfect.

SP!: Who is your main audience?

SS: That is the rub for me. I'm not sure. Epic fantasy fans (whoever they are). Age-wise I've been told my stories could be YA, yet those who've liked them when they've read them seem to be all ages and both male and female. I've also been told they are "reinforcer" stories. Perhaps anyone who believes that there are things in life worth fighting for, and sacrificing for.

SP!: If you could travel back in time ten years what would you tell the younger version of yourself?

SS: I wouldn't.

Don't get me wrong. There are many things I would love to change. Anyone who lives for any length of time has regrets, things they wish they had done or hadn't done. For instance, I would have left one day earlier to go see my father-in-law. so I wouldn't have arrived just hours after he died. (I loved that man.) But I believe that people are faced with events, situations, problems, and decisions which enable them to grow and learn.

If I went back and altered just one event, then that would result in my missing or not learning or not realizing something or some things that I now know or have experienced. It might also, perhaps, necessitate facing something worse in the future. in order to learn/realize those same things.

Even more importantly, since most likely. there were other people involved, either directly or tangentially, in the changed situation, I would impact their lives in unknown and perhaps damaging ways.

Links

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